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Common livestock feed additive poses risks to human health, lawsuit says

By **Clark Mindock**

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The headquarters of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is shown in Silver Spring, Maryland, November 4, 2009. REUTERS/Jason Reed/File Photo Purchase Licensing Rights

Summary Companies

- FDA-approved drug is used in as many as 80% of U.S. pigs
- The drug's use has been banned in the EU and elsewhere

March 27 (Reuters) - Major food safety, environmental and animal rights groups have sued the U.S. Food and Drug Administration seeking to force it to reconsider approvals for a widely-used livestock growth drug they say is putting human health at risk and causing stress in farm animals prior to slaughter.

The Center for Food Safety, the Center for Biological Diversity, the Animal Legal Defense Fund and others, filed the lawsuit in federal court in Washington, D.C., saying the FDA largely ignored two requests to review its approval for ractopamine, which has already been banned or restricted in at least 160 countries, including the European Union, Russia and China.

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The FDA didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

The only formal study to date of ractopamine's impacts on human health was cut off early after participants experienced significant increases in heart rate after receiving low doses, according to the lawsuit.

The drug is added to animal feed to promote muscle growth in as many as 80% of U.S. pigs, as well as in turkeys and cows, the groups said.

The groups said the FDA's own files contain reports that ractopamine and similar drugs cause nausea, dizziness, respiratory problems and heart issues when it is inhaled or ingested by farm workers or people who consume meat from animals whose feed contained the drug.

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Ractopamine can also cause severe cardiovascular stress, muscular skeletal tremors, increased aggression and hyperactivity in farm animals, the lawsuit said.

The groups said the FDA blew past a requirement under the Administrative Procedure Act to respond within a reasonable time to the petitions they filed in 2012 and 2020 asking the agency to ban or severely limit use of the drug. The lawsuit is asking the court to force the FDA to respond to the petitions, which could in turn spur stricter regulations or a ban.

The FDA first approved ractopamine for use in American farm animals in 1999. The European Union banned ractopamine in 2009 after finding in part that data did not support a conclusion that the drug is safe, according to the groups.

The groups previously challenged the drug's approval in court in 2014, but that litigation was thrown out, largely on procedural grounds.

The case is Animal Legal Defense Fund et al. v. Xavier Becerra et al., in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, case No. 1:24-cv-00857.

For the plaintiffs: Daniel Waltz, Mary-Bailey Frank and Larissa Liebmann of the Animal Legal Defense Fund

For the U.S. government: Not immediately available

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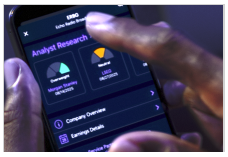

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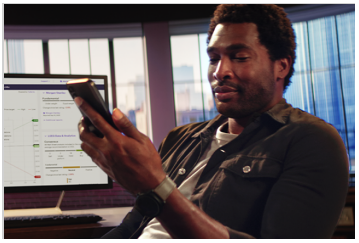

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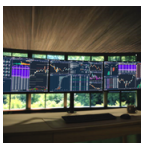

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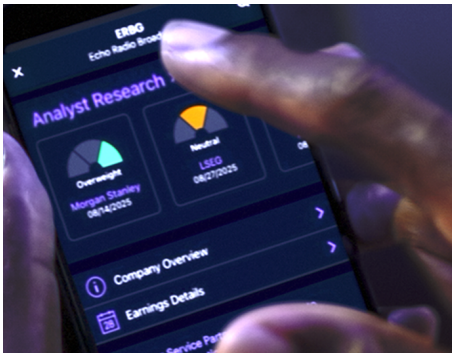

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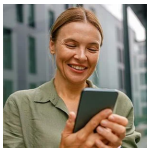

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